

Ben Evans

CIA's evasion casts doubts on the integrity
of US journalists and others working abroad

Action!!

Mr Ford fails to act over spies

From James Reston
Washington, April 28

In its censored report on the overseas operations of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Senate intelligence committee confirms that the CIA has been using United States reporters, academics, and even religious leaders as paid spies, but refuses to disclose the names of those involved.

Moreover, according to the committee, this practice is still going on, and all efforts by officials of the universities, churches and the media to get the facts so that the practice can be stopped, have been evaded by the CIA for years.

This raises troubling questions, the Senate committee observes, about preservation of the integrity of American academic institutions. It does more than that; it casts doubt on the operations of all media, religious and academic representatives abroad, without giving their institutions the opportunity of defending themselves against the corruption of their work. Several observations about this were made:

1. For years leading American newspapers have requested and received from the CIA assurances that none of their staff members was being used by the CIA as paid informers.

2. The answer usually given by the CIA was that this practice was common some time ago but had been discontinued at least as far as staff members of the newspapers were concerned. Maybe some "stringers" or part-time space rate reporters for American papers were used, but even this was not common CIA practice.

3. When detailed investigations by the House and Senate intelligence committees disclosed that this was not true

and that the practice continued, again the CIA refused to cooperate with the papers when they asked for a private list so they could clean house.

Still, the Senate committee report says that the CIA had covert relationships with about 50 American journalists or employees of United States media organizations until February, 1976, and continues to have relationships with more than half of them.

It adds that more than a dozen United States news organizations and commercial publishing houses formally provided cover for CIA agents abroad. A few of these organizations were unaware that they provided this cover.

This invites the inference that most of these news organizations and commercial publishing houses knowingly provided cover for spies and still do so, thus leaving the reader without a clue as to which news organizations are innocent and which are guilty of misleading the public.

A distinction should probably be made here between normal contacts by reporters with CIA agents, and using reporters as paid CIA agents. American reporters assigned abroad often seek information from CIA officials, and have usually found their information to be accurate, if not always complete.

This practice, particularly during the Vietnam war, often led to exchanging of information between the reporter and the agent, to the benefit of both. But reporters serving as paid agents of the Government is a different matter. Most reporters in Washington, for example, will not accept pay for going on talk shows for the official "Voice of America", lest they seem to be putting out the United States official propaganda line.

What is troubling about this

is, that President Ford does not simply issue an order to the CIA to stop the practice. Some of us have talked to him privately about it and he does not condone it, nor does he deny the intelligence committee's report that the practice continues.

The dilemma is that he does not stop it himself or make available, in private if necessary, the information the media, the universities and the churches need to abolish the practice themselves.

It is common practice, of course, for communist governments to use what they call reporters as spies, and vice versa. Even some of the West European governments have used journalists as cover for their agents, but not until the Second World War did the United States Government consciously subvert its own reporters and academics.

The Senate intelligence committee report will now go to Congress for remedial action, and no doubt there will be closer control by Congress over the finances and covert operations of the CIA. But this will take time.

The CIA itself has been complaining, often with good cause, that the press was interfering with its legitimate intelligence-gathering functions, particularly in the publishing of the names of its spies. Here the reporters and others have some responsibility not to subvert their own profession or the essential work of the CIA, but this does not justify the CIA in trying to subvert the press.

Nor does it absolve the President. The CIA is his intelligence agency, and all he has to do is to call George Bush, its director, on the telephone to clear up the mess.—New York Times News Service.

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Executive Registry

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BEN:

I wonder if we could get a letter to Reston saying what facts are what policy is. and CIA not subverting press, and problem has been solved. who has been drafted for my consideration such a letter. I have not decided (am

to send one. But I
would like one drafted!

Thoughtful -
concluding, ~~not~~ from
against publish names - but
a real effort to cheer up the
mess!!

GP

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